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ABSTRACT

Views on outcomes of affirmative action policy for U.S. higher education, areas of conflict, and changes that might promote affirmative action are discussed. It is suggested that affirmative action in college hiring and admissions has resulted in a small proportion of the opportunities made available to black Americans over the past two decades. But for the country as a whole, the majority of blacks who are hired, and who enroll in school, do so without special or preferential treatment and in spite of discrimination. Statistics show that in 1981 black faculty comprised 4.2% of the total higher education faculty, while black administrators comprised 6.8%. Most of these black staff are employed in predominantly or traditionally black institutions. Once black staff enter the predominantly white institutions, they face many overt and hidden obstacles to advancement. One issue is that blacks often are heavily involved in service activities that are not rewarded professionally. The following changes are needed: reducing the attrition rates for black students; decreasing the overrepresentation of white males in the system, preserving traditionally black institutions, and increasing the number of black Ph.D.s. (SW)

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BLACK FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by Niara Sudarkasa

Many claim that affirmative action has gone too far—that under its mantle, America has done too much for too many who are undeserving. Others, including some neo-conservative blacks, who are touted as the right-thinking spokesmen (underline *men*) for the black intelligentsia, maintain that affirmative action has actually been a disservice to blacks. Some argue that it is a disincentive to work hard and make it on one's own, and that it promotes failure, particularly among students, by bringing in the underprepared who promptly flunk out or drop out as a result of too much pressure.

The high rate of black unemployment in this country and the underrepresentation of blacks in many fields, such as education, show that America has *not* done "too much" for "undeserving" blacks under the guise of affirmative action. Nor is it the case that by providing opportunities for what turns out to be a relatively small proportion of the black population, are we discouraging initiative or willy nilly setting people up for failure—certainly not to the extent that we do when we leave them to flounder under the morass of impediments to advancement that constitute the everyday world of most black Americans.

Let me set the record straight. Affirmative action is at most twenty-years old. Affirmative action in hiring and in admissions to educational institutions has been responsible for a *small*, though not insignificant, proportion of the opportunities made available to black Americans over the past two decades. But, when one takes the country as a whole, it is clear that the vast majority of blacks who are hired, and who enroll in school, do so without any special or preferential treatment. In fact, the opposite is true: they do so *in spite of* barriers of discrimination they still have to hurdle at almost every turn.

It should be obvious that no 20-year old program can adequately redress the nearly three-hundred years blacks suffered in slavery in the United States. Neither can it atone for the century of jim crow and other ideologies of discrimination that have stifled blacks' progress for the 120 years since emancipation was officially proclaimed. proclaimed.

For the most part, the history of the mass of blacks in this country has been a movement from fully employed chattel labor, to minimally employed menial labor, to underemployed manual labor, to unemployed superfluous labor. The majority of our children have gone from being uneducated to being miseducated to being maleducated, without ever knowing what opportunities open up for the genuinely educated classes in this society. Socially, the masses of blacks have moved, as August Meier put it, from the plantation to the ghetto, and, I would add, without being able to see much of a qualitative difference.

Affirmative action has been important because it opened doors in *some* segments of the American labor force for *some* minorities and white women. As a matter of record, however, both in the corporate world and in higher education, the progress of white females as a result of affirmative action has far outstripped that for blacks and other minorities.

I mention this not to drive a wedge between white women and minorities, but rather to emphasize that the white women who have benefitted from affirmative action are not usually the targets of charges of incompetence or of law suits charging reverse discrimination (although they themselves have instituted discrimination suits against various institutions). Rather, it has been the relatively smaller number of blacks and other

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minorities who have benefitted from affirmative action who are now beleaguered and besieged with subtle and explicit charges that they received preference without being prepared, that they profitted from "quotas" (the label that is conveniently used to dismiss all numerical goals, no matter how reasonable) without being qualified.

Such discussions overlook the fact that white males often are the beneficiaries of economic and academic largesse. Differential and preferential access to society's resources is a documented fact for white males. In academia and in the corporate world, it is facilitated by the "old boys' networks." Every day, hundreds of white males are given opportunities not because of *what* they know, but *who* they know. Others are likely to shake their heads and say "what a lucky guy," or "he got a break;" or they rationalize and say "he deserved it." Very seldom do they cry foul; they know "that's the system;" they hope that their day will come. The ambitious ones try to position themselves so that they won't be passed over the next time.

A different response usually greets blacks seeking access to opportunities previously denied to or circumscribed for members of their racial group. When they are offered opportunities to acquire skills or perform jobs from which they were excluded because of past discriminatory practices in education and/or employment, someone is likely to charge "reverse discrimination." Such charges amount to a sanction of *continued* discrimination by insisting that inequalities resulting from privileges and preferences historically reserved for whites (usually males) as a *group* must now be *perpetuated* in the name of "justice for the individual."

According to the logic that apparently underlies much of the opposition to affirmative action, unless it can be proven that discrimination by or against a particular *individual* has taken place, it is inappropriate to seek redress for the demonstrated *cumulative* effects of past discrimination by a *group* of people against other *groups*. In other words, past discrimination by a group against other groups cannot be rectified because the rules of the game are changed. Previously, individuals were discriminated against *because* of their group membership; now they cannot expect redress *despite* their group membership.

This article is adapted from Dr. Sudarkasa's speech to the Third Ohio Conference on Issues Facing Women and Black Faculty and Administrators in Higher Education, April 17-18, 1986, Oberlin College.

> Reverse discrimination charges amount to a sanction of continued discrimination by insisting that inequalities resulting from privileges historically reserved for whites as a group must now be perpetuated in the name of "justice for the individual."

Nowhere are the tensions caused by debate over the policies and results of affirmative action more blatant than in higher education. It is commonly assumed by those on both sides of the debate that affirmative action has "opened up" the professional ranks of higher education for minorities, particularly for blacks. Yet, for all the commotion, the data show that affirmative action has not had the impact on the hiring of blacks in higher education that either its critics or its exponents might think or have us believe.

According to the American Council on Education's *1985 Report on Minorities in Higher Education*, in 1981 black faculty comprised 4.2% of the total higher education faculty, down slightly from 4.3% in 1979. Black administrators comprised 6.8% of all administrators, down from 7.4% in 1979. These statistics mask a situation that is even worse than the small numbers convey; most of the black faculty and administrators are employed in predominantly or traditionally black institutions.

According to the same ACE Report, in 1984, black faculty employed by predominantly white colleges and universities constituted only about 2.2% of the total faculty. Black administrators comprised only 2.5% of the staff in these institutions. A National Center for Education Statistics study entitled: "The Traditionally Black Institutions of Higher Education, 1860-1982," reports that in the 19 states and the District of Columbia where the traditionally black institutions are located, over one-half of the black administrators employed in higher education are in the black institutions. Fully two-thirds of the black faculty in those states and the District are at the black colleges and universities.

There is another problem. Once they enter the predominantly white institutions, they face many overt and hidden obstacles to advancement. In fact, black and white faculty often have such different experiences with the requirements and rewards of the professoriate that it is almost as if we are working in two different systems. Black faculty may have to confront their white colleagues, chairpersons and/or deans over salaries and support; advancement; merit and the criteria by which it is judged; and evaluation, both in terms of process and outcome.

On the other side, white faculty observing the hiring and promotion of black faculty often claim that objective criteria are being set aside and lower standards are applied, with resultant differential treatment and reverse discrimination.

Blacks then counter with complaints that service activities in which they are heavily involved go unrewarded; tenure decisions favor white males; unequal access to perquisites and power is built into the system; funding for research favors mainstream scholarship and therefore discourages scholarly output that would challenge many of the prejudices masquerading as science; and finally, that fairness to blacks and other minorities requires that colleges and universities pay more than lip service to affirmative action.

Black faculty often find themselves in a Catch-22 situation when they seek what from their point of view is fairness, but from the majority point of view is preferential treatment. When black faculty ask for salary equity, for example, they often receive the retort that they have not been as productive as their colleagues. They reply that they are overburdened with service responsibilities and should not be expected to produce as much in the way of research. The reply often comes back that the same objective criteria must be followed in all cases and "surely blacks would not want standards to be lowered to accommodate them."

Blacks counter that fairness demands flexible criteria; their white colleagues contend that that would constitute preferential treatment and reverse discrimination. Blacks then complain of unequal access to deci-

sion-making positions. They are reminded that such perquisites come with tenure. Pointing to the lack of advancement, blacks say more black faculty deserve tenure. They are told that this is earned on the basis of merit. They ask how merit is determined; their chairmen or deans point to evaluations. Blacks then ask for the basis of the evaluations, and are back to the issue of objective criteria.

Some blacks throw up their hands and say they are tired of this same old stuff and threaten to take the university to court or, worse yet, to take to the streets. The Old Boys shake their heads and say that if it hadn't been for affirmative action, such rabble rousers would not have been in the academy in the first place!

This attempt to bring some levity to the situation belies its gravity. We all know that it is serious. As I have noted, the numbers of black faculty and administrators in higher education today is small and dwindling. And this is not only the case in predominantly white institutions; it is so in traditionally black institutions as well.

The 1985 ACE Report notes that whites constitute nearly 39% of the faculty and 16% of the administrators at the traditionally black institutions. As previously mentioned, blacks comprise only 2.2% of the faculty and 2.5% of the administrators at the predominantly white institutions. The Report goes on to say: "many higher education officials, and indeed, many desegregation researchers consider the black institutions to be 'too black,' while the white institutions are perceived as 'integrated'."

In the wake of the Adams decision, many of the traditionally black public institutions are mandated to substantially reduce the percentage of black faculty and administrators on campus, as well as the percentage of black students. We are told that desegregation of these traditionally black institutions will bring about more integration and greater equality of opportunity. But the declining numbers of blacks in higher education demonstrate that the demise of some and the redirection of other traditionally black institutions creates a vacuum that is not being filled by opportunities elsewhere in higher education.

The statistics on blacks in the pipeline leading toward the graduate and professional degrees that would enable them to compete for jobs in higher education reveal an equally disquieting picture.

Between 1972 and 1980, the enrollment of full-time black graduate students declined from 5.3% to 5.0% of all graduate students; the full-time enrollment of blacks in professional schools also declined from 4.8% to 4.6%. Black enrollment in medical schools peaked at 6.3% in 1975; by 1985, it was down to 5.9%. The percentage of masters degrees awarded to blacks between 1976 and 1981 declined by 16%, a figure four times greater than the decline for non-blacks. Even though the proportion of doctorates awarded to blacks during the same time period increased by three-tenths of a percent, the data since 1981 suggest a downward trend in black recipients of those degrees as well.

Given these trends, what is the likelihood of substantially *increasing* the level of black participation in higher education as faculty and administrators? The answer is clear.

In the short run, for the country as a whole, the chances are minimal to none. The chances of significantly *decreasing* the level of that participation are very great if affirmative action is abandoned. In other words, if we want to retain even a relatively steady state of affairs, we need to make certain that we do not slip back into the exclusionary and often blatantly discriminatory hiring practices of the past.

In the long run, in order to significantly increase the representation of black faculty and administrators in higher education, educational opportunities for blacks must be enhanced and enriched at all levels in the educational system from kindergarten to graduate school. As Harold Hodgkinson has convincingly argued, education in America is in fact "All One System" and what happens at any point in it reverberates throughout. Let me highlight a few areas where change is needed:

1) The rates of attrition for black students must be reduced at all levels in the system. Nationally, over 30% of the black students who enter ninth grade fail to graduate from high school; in most urban areas, the drop-out rate is 40% or more. Nationally, the black rate of graduation from college is about 42%; in other words, 58% of those who enter college do not finish. Only half of those who enter graduate school complete their degrees.

It is particularly urgent that black students who enter colleges be given the necessary academic and financial support to enable them to successfully complete their degrees. Moreover, they should be encouraged and enabled to pursue graduate work in what for them are "non-traditional" as well as traditional fields of study.

In short, we must increase the preparedness, performance, and persistence of blacks at every rung of the educational ladder so that we can enlarge the pool of those who can be recruited into academia as faculty and administrators.

2) We must face the fact that it will be impossible to significantly increase the representation of blacks, other minorities, and women in higher education unless we *decrease* the overrepresentation of white males in the system. And there's the rub. Many white males are willing to admit blacks, other minorities, and women into faculty and administrative positions in higher education so long as their own numbers are not diminished. Many are prepared to talk about the over-representation of black students on the financial aid rolls, but are not prepared to come to grips with the fundamental and inequitable over-representation of white males in virtually every type of higher education institution in the country.

If higher education in this country were not a scarce commodity, we could envision expanding opportunities to accommodate all who were able to take advantage of them. But since the structure is pyramidal, with room for relatively few at the top, it must be recognized that room for the hitherto excluded must be provided by those who benefitted from their exclusion.

3) Given the unlikelihood that mainstream higher education will soon open up to admit an equitable number of deserving blacks and other minorities at either the student or

faculty/staff level, the preservation or creation of high quality intitutions catering especially (though not exclusively) to their educational needs makes sense. Thus, for the forseeable future, the survival and revitalization of the traditionally black institutions is critical to the enhancement of opportunities for blacks in higher education.

According to an article cited in the 1985 ACE Report, 55% of the 6,320 blacks who received doctorates between 1975 and 1980 had received their undergraduate degrees from 87 traditionally black institutions. The other 45% received their baccalaureate degrees from 633 predominantly white institutions.

Given the fact that, by the 1990's, the college age population of minorities will have increased substantially while that of the present majority will have decreased, there will certainly be an increased demand for greater representation of minorities in the student bodies, particularly in the public institutions. There is already evidence, however, that some institutions, even those that are tax supported, will choose to become smaller rather than (in their views) "compromise on quality" by admitting larger cohorts of minority students. If there is such a move to shrink the size of the overall system of higher education, or some significant segments of it, minorities will have to mobilize to insist that there by elasticity in the system to accommodate their educational needs.

4) In any case, given the underrepresentation of blacks and other minorities in the graduate programs leading to academic careers, it is likely that, in the 1990's, their representation on college and university faculties will be even smaller in relation to both majority faculty and minority students than is the case today. We know that the increase in the proportion of black Ph.D.s in the 1970s was not accompanied by a proportional increase in their representation on higher education faculties. Therefore, we can presume that increasing the proportion of black faculty in this century will require *more* than simply increasing the number of black Ph.D.s.

Increasing the representation of blacks in higher education over the short run will require that some institutions recruit more widely in the pool of potential candidates than they do today. Virtually every college or university wants to hire only the few black Ph.D.'s who are at the top of their fields. (Hence, the pattern of musical chairs observable over the past decade or so in the careers of some of the most outstanding young black faculty in the major research universities).

> It will be impossible to significantly increase the representation of minorities and women in higher education unless we decrease the overrepresentation of white males in the system. And there's the rub.

Realism should dictate that, in order to have more blacks (and other minorities) on college and university faculties, it will be necessary to recruit, nurture, and *retain* scholars currently denied tenure because their "productivity" (read publication) record is judged to be inadequate. For reasons the white scholarly community finds hard to accept, black faculty are usually at a disadvantage as they climb the tenure ladder. A combination of legitimate competing demands on their time, the non-traditional nature of much of their scholarship, and biases in the publication process itself, make it very difficult for many of them to compile the type of "scholarly record" demanded for advancement in academia. As a result, far too many bright, talented, and capable black faculty members fail to achieve tenure in institutions that enroll, or aspire to enroll, many of the best and the brightest black students. Both the black faculty and the black students are deprived in the process.

What many black scholars provide in the way of new and exciting intellectual perspectives in the classroom (and in their publications, even though they may not be in the most prestigious journals), what they contribute through their dedication and enthusiasm for teaching and their commitment and service to students, and what they give in service to the institutions and to their professions, can be far more valuable than the soon-to-be forgotten research and publications of many whites who get promoted while the blacks are terminated. Even the best colleges and universities have some white male faculty who may be generously characterized as run-of-the-mill; why then must every black be a super star?

We are now within a stone's throw of the 21st century. Blacks came to America at least as early as 1619. There followed over two and a half centuries of enslavement and almost another century and a half of discrimination. I would not characterize this as second class citizenship; that status belongs only to the privileged among us. For most blacks, it would be a matter of third or fourth class citizenship. In fact, American history should be revised to get away from the notion that blacks were "freed" in 1865. We have to realize that for the past 120 years, we have been *seeking to implement* the Emancipation Proclamation; the 20th century has been a century of strides *toward* freedom.

Education has proven both a route toward equality and a symbol of some measure of its attainment. But equality has been elusive. With the economic means to advancement being denied to all but a small segment of the black population, it follows that higher education, never a free commodity, would be available only to the select few. Were it not for the collective efforts of the blacks and their benefactors who established the black colleges and universities, and thereby, as we say, made "a way out of no way," the number of blacks in academia and in the professions would be far fewer than it is in 1986.

Blacks are at a crossroads in the pursuit of higher education. It is clear that unless equity and equality are put at the forefront of the higher education agenda, we will enter the 21st century still in search of freedom.

In my most optimistic moments, I dare to think that the 21st century will bring full emancipation for blacks and equity for others to whom this is still denied. Hopefully, it would be a century in which the concepts of freedom and equality are understood and accepted by all. But, as a realist, I know that the chances of this happening are geometrically proportional to the levels of pressure and power that can be mobilized by those who are still denied their full measure of citizenship. Those of us who are members of what, in the language of affirmative action, are euphemistically called "protected groups," will have to insist upon equality and demand equity from our "protectors." ■